United Nations

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MONDAY HIGHLIGHTS

- Secretary-General expresses "deep concern" about Israeli deportation orders against four Palestinian residents of occupied Gaza Strip.

- Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari arrives in Kuwait via Bahrain, aboard UNDRO plane carrying 24 tons of emergency relief items.

- World Food Programme provides emergency food aid totalling more than $52 million to seven African countries.

- Committee on Natural Resources begins twelfth session in New York.

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Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar said today through his spokesman that he had learned "with deep concern" about the deportation orders issued against four Palestinian residents of the Israeli occupied Gaza Strip.

He said he had called upon Israeli authorities to reconsider their decision "in contravention of Article 49 of the Fourth Geneva Convention". The Secretary-General expressed hope that all sides would refrain from acts that could serve only to heighten tension in the area and undermine the confidence essential to positive dialogue and the start of an effective negotiating process.

In a related development, the Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), Ilter Turkmen, has expressed regret about the Israeli expulsions saying that two of the four Palestine refugees threatened by deportation were UNRWA employees.

Briefing correspondents today on his new responsibilities as head of the specialized agency and his recent visits to Gaza, the West Bank and Jordan, he said the consequences of the Gulf war on the Palestinian population living in the occupied territories had been grave. Mr. Turkmen pointed out that the many curfews, imposed daily by Israeli authorities, had prevented Palestinians from going to work. UNRWA had therefore started emergency food distribution in the area to relieve the situation.

(more)

For information media—not an official record

In other related news, the Government of Israel has categorically objected to the idea of convening a meeting of the parties to the Fourth Geneva Convention as advocated by the Secretary-General last December.

In a letter to the Secretary-General, dated 22 March, Israeli Ambassador Yoram Aridor called the proposal "an astonishing act of singling out Israel". In the 40 years the Convention had been in effect, he said, millions of innocent civilians had been killed, and the international community had not once called a meeting of the signatories to address the violations. He said Israel had undertaken to apply all the humanitarian provisions of the Convention on a de facto basis and a meeting of the parties would only politicize international humanitarian law and thereby undermine its effectiveness.

In other communications, the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) has called on the Security Council to take action to ensure the safety of Palestinians in Kuwait.

In a letter, dated 21 March, transmitted to the Secretary-General by the Permanent Observer for Palestine, Nasser Al-Kidwa, the PLO said that violent and criminal actions were being continuously committed against the 150,000 Palestinians still living in Kuwait. Palestinians were being beaten, tortured to death, kidnapped by the thousands, and deprived of food and security.

In a similar letter to the Secretary-General, dated 20 March, Sudan has protested against the treatment of Sudanese nationals in Kuwait. Sudanese Ambassador Josep Lagu said that Sudanese residents were being subjected to atrocities, humiliation and inhuman harassment by what he called "irresponsible elements among the Kuwaiti people". He said reports indicated that at least one Sudanese national was murdered in cold blood in Kuwait City before the eyes of his wife who was later subjected to "indecent and inhuman treatment".

Mr. Lagu asked the Secretary-General to contact the Kuwaiti authorities for an investigation of the reported atrocities in the country.

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A United Nations official told correspondents today that Under-Secretary-General Martti Ahtisaari had arrived this morning in Kuwait via Bahrain, aboard a plane of the Office of the United Nations Disaster Relief Coordinator (UNDRO) carrying 24 tons of emergency relief items to be delivered to the Red Cross in Kuwait. Mr. Ahtisaari's mission was expected to end this week, he said.

Meanwhile, the mission headed by Mr. Abdulrahim Abby Farah continued to collect data relevant to its mandate from continuous meetings with Kuwaiti officials and Non-Governmental Organizations, by on-site visits and from land and aerial surveys, the official said.

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Emergency food aid worth more than $52 million will be provided by the World Food Programme (WFP) to seven African countries. Over 1 million displaced Liberian refugees and internally displaced persons will receive food aid valued at $47 million. In addition, emergency food aid totalling more than $5 million will be sent to drought victims in Mauritania, Sudanese and Ugandan refugees in Zaire, and Somalian refugees and asylum-seekers in Kenya.

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The Committee on Natural Resources began today its two-week twelfth session at Headquarters during which priority consideration will be given to the question of energy resources and their exploration, development and efficient use in developing countries.

The 34-member Committee, which is concerned with the exploration, development and management of energy, water and mineral resources, will examine reports of the Secretary-General on those issues. Among other issues covered by the reports are permanent sovereignty over natural resources; disaster prevention and mitigation in developing and utilizing natural resources; and the United Nations Revolving Fund for Natural Resources Exploration.

Established in 1970 by the Economic and Social Council, the Committee meets every two years.

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